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ABSTRACT

Most academic libraries undertake the collection and reporting of statistical information on activity levels for many aspects of both technical and public services. Data on reference activity are used for a variety of purposes within the library, primarily to facilitate planning and improve delivery of reference services, and also externally, where they are used for broad inter-institutional comparisons which often have a direct impact on operations. The Canadian Association of College and University Libraries (CACUL) Task Force on Reference Statistics was established in October 1985 with a dual mandate: (1) to develop definitions, forms, and procedures, and to conduct a pilot study to establish a body of data on reference activities in Canadian academic libraries; and (2) to develop a means of measuring patron satisfaction with reference service. In 1990, the Working Group on Reference Statistics was formed to address the first part of the mandate. Questionnaires were developed and sent to academic libraries, the results of which led to the development of draft definitions and forms. A pilot project to test the efficacy and acceptability of definitions and forms was undertaken in March 1993. Responses were received from 10 universities (66.6%) and 15 colleges (93.8%). Results are discussed. Appendices include: a pretest questionnaire; a survey questionnaire; instructions; definitions; forms; and a questionnaire distributed after the test period. (SWC)

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Report of the CACUL Working Group on Reference Statistics

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Occasional Paper Series, No. 10

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Report of the CACUL Working Group on Reference Statistics

by

Jane Philipps

September 1995

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The members of the CACUL Working Group on Reference Statistics gratefully acknowledge the contributions of all the individuals who participated in the pretest, survey, and pilot project. Your thoughtful and thought-provoking comments and suggestions are greatly appreciated as is your patience in awaiting this final report. We trust that you will find your insights and experiences represented here.

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INTRODUCTION

The CACUL Task Force on Reference Statistics was established in October 1985 with a dual mandate:

> To develop definitions, forms, and procedures, and to conduct a pilot study to establish a body of data on reference activities in Canadian academic libraries

and

> To develop a means of measuring patron satisfaction with reference service.

The original task force focussed on the second of these two. During its tenure, the Task Force investigated instruments of evaluation, and examined, tested, and endorsed the Wisconsin-Ohio Methodology developed by Charles Bunge and Marjorie Murfin. The results of the Task Force's work were published in three CACUL Occasional Papers. "Evaluation of Reference Services at the University of Waterloo" (1985); "Wisconsin-Ohio Reference Evaluation at the University of Waterloo" (1989); and "Comparison of Reference Success in Canadian and American Libraries Participating in the Wisconsin-Ohio Reference Evaluation Process" (1989). The Task Force recommended the Wisconsin-Ohio Reference Evaluation Process as an economical, well-designed and effective means of measuring the quality of reference service.

The Task Force submitted its final report to the CACUL Executive in June 1989. The Executive felt that continuing work was required with respect to the first-named initiative - to establish a body of data on reference activities in academic libraries and to develop definitions, forms, and procedures.

In January 1990 a new CACUL Working Group on Reference Statistics was struck. Its members were Sandra Black, Mohawk College, Andrea Glover and Jim Kelly from the University of Lethbridge, and Jane Philipps, Queen's University. In initial discussions, Working Group members identified some of the issues to be addressed. Why do we keep reference statistics? Do they serve a useful purpose? How are they collected and reported? What are they used for? What should and could they be used for? How is reference activity defined? Are standard definitions and forms that can be used in all Canadian academic libraries (a) desirable and (b) feasible?

One of the members of the original task force wrote, that within the term of its mandate, the task force had not had time to

> come to grips with the several cans of worms associated with the more mundane statistics collected at reference desks on a daily, or at least regular basis. They did not have time to pick up the canopener, or even open the cupboard to examine the cans.

In its second incarnation, the Working Group has opened the cupboard, opened the cans, examined and made some recommendations on the handling of the worms.

METHODOLOGY

In November 1991 the Working Group developed a survey designed to collect information on current activities relating to the collection, reporting, and use of reference statistics in Canadian academic libraries (Appendix 1). The questionnaire was pretested by a group of 12 college and 10 university libraries. On the basis of comments from the pretest participants, the questionnaire was revised and a full-fledged survey was undertaken in the spring of 1992 (Appendix 2).

Questionnaires were sent to 42 university libraries of which 33 (or 78.6 percent) responded and to 76 college libraries of which 43 (or 56.6 percent) responded. The number and quality of responses provided evidence of the level of interest in the issue of reference statistics. Many respondents took the time to express their concerns and desires in great and thought-provoking detail.

The information collected in the survey, particularly the comments regarding strengths and weaknesses of current practice and suggestions for possible improvement, led to the development of draft definitions and forms. A pilot project to test the efficacy and acceptability of definitions and forms was undertaken in March 1993. Instructions, definitions, and forms were mailed to 15 university and 16 college libraries for testing in the busy March period (Appendices 3 to 5). Following the test period participants completed a questionnaire (Appendix 6) and provided evaluative comments on the forms and definitions used in the test. Responses were received from 10 universities (66.6 percent) and from 15 colleges (93.8 percent). Definitions and forms were revised on the basis of pilot project responses.

The Working Group submitted its Final Report recommending the adoption and promotion of the definitions and forms as a national standard to the CACUL Executive in February 1994 (Appendix 7). The CACUL Executive endorsed the Working Group's recommendations.

THE SURVEY - RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Collection of data on reference activities

The following tables identify the questions asked in the survey of current activities related to the collection, reporting and use of reference statistics in Canadian academic libraries and show the percentage of responses received, broken down by college and university libraries. These data and the comments of survey respondents provide an overview of the major issues and concerns raised by repondents to our survey. The issues raised are remarkably similar across the board and the results offer a picture of the situation in 1992.

Information on responses to the questions relating to collection of data on reference activities are presented in Table 1. Five university libraries (12 percent of the original sample) and 16 college libraries (21 percent of the original sample) did not, at the time of the survey, collect information on reference activities.

29.4 percent of college libraries and 56.7 percent of university libraries indicated that they had a written definition of a reference transaction. In actual fact, the majority of definitions provided represented descriptions of the various categories by which reference transactions are classified rather than any prescriptive definition of what a reference transaction is.

Table 1. Responses to questions on the collection of reference statistics broken down by college and university libraries

QUESTION	COLLEGE	UNIVERSITY
1. Do you have a written definition of a "reference" transaction?	Yes: 29.4	Yes: 56.7
2. A formal record of the number of reference transactions is maintained at:		
Reference/Information Desk	91.7	100.0
Public service points other than a Reference/Information Desk	69.7	56.7
Locations other than designated service points	11.4	16.7
3. Recorded transactions are categorized to indicate level of complexity in terms of:		
Time required to complete the transaction	54.3	20.0
Definition reflecting complexity of intellectual content	40.0	53.3
Other	8.3	10.0
4. Recorded transactions are categorized by:		
Hour of the day	32.4	66.7
Time of day (e.g. morning, evening)	57.1	66.7
Day of the week	80.0	90.0
Patron category	17.1	16.7
Communication mode	28.6	56.7
Other	11.4	30.0
5. There are categories of questions handled at the Reference/Information Desk which are not recorded.	39.4	41.4
6. A formal record of transactions not completed to the satisfaction of either or both patron and the library staff member is maintained.	45.7	6.7

Non-prescriptive descriptions of categories of reference transactions are exemplified below:

> "*Quick Reference*: Any questions that can be answered without leaving the desk, including directions and referrals. *Reference:* Any question that takes one away from the desk and which is anwered in less than fifteen minutes. *Extended Reference:* Any question that takes one away from the desk and which requires more than fifteen minutes to answer."

Those institutions which supplied a "prescriptive" definition generally employed some version of the definition which provided the Working Group with its final model.

In general, "reference" activities, as defined by survey respondents, were broadly categorized as directional, short reference, and long reference, with the distinction between "short" and "long" based on time required to complete the transaction. A number of institutions used a separate category for instructional exchanges, sometimes further divided as quick instruction and long instruction. Many included a category for extended reference. A large number of institutions included directional exchanges under the rubric of reference, however, 41.4 percent of university libraries and 39.4 percent of college libraries indicated that directional questions answered at the reference desk were not recorded as reference activity.

In the majority of cases, "definitions" reflecting complexity of intellectual content of queries were also expressed in terms of time required to complete the transaction. There was a great deal of variation in the amount of time used to distinguish between "easy" and "hard" reference queries. Time factors range from three minutes to two hours with five and fifteen minutes being the most commonly used cutoffs between simple and complex reference transactions. In addition to categorization by question type, information on reference transactions was also generally broken down by time, communication mode or patron type.

Although as a rule there is a great deal of similarity between responses from colleges and universities, the difference in Question 6 is worthy of note. Only 6.7 percent of university libraries maintain a record of transactions not completed satisfactorily compared to 45.7 percent of college libraries. Many college respondents indicated that records of dissatisfaction were used to identify and remedy gaps in the collection, cataloguing problems, and lack of subject expertise on the part of reference staff handling the question.

Reporting of data on reference activities

Information on the reporting of data on reference activities is presented in Table 2. Despite the level of detail used in recording/collecting data on reference activities, very few colleges or universities employed the same level of detail in reporting on the data collected. Data collected were primarily reported in terms of total numbers of transactions. Detailed information relating to time of day or patron category or communication mode or complexity appeared to be used for internal purposes only.

Table 2. Responses to questions on the reporting of reference statistics

QUESTION	College	University
1. Reference statistics are reported:		
Monthly	82.9	75.0
Annually	54.3	64.3
Other	14.3	21.4
2. Reference statistics are reported to:		
Reference staff	71.4	75.9
Library administration	94.3	93.3
College administration	74.3	53.3
External organizations	22.9	30.0
3. Reference transactions are reported:		
As total number of transactions	97.1	100.0
By hour of the day	20.6	14.8
By time of the day (e.g. morning)	29.4	17.9
By day of the week	39.4	25.0
By patron category	11.8	10.3
By communication mode	14.7	42.9
Other	32.4	25.0

Table 3 . Responses to questions on the use of reference statistics

QUESTION	College	University
1. **Reported statistics are used to:**		
Evaluate reference service	43.7	37.9
Determine levels of staffing	75.0	86.2
Determine levels of budget support	46.9	26.7
Determine hours of service	75.0	86.7
Evaluate instructional programmes	21.9	26.7
Identify collection development needs	53.1	30.0
Other	6.2	3.3

Use of reference data

Although we commonly refer to the collection of reference *statistics*, the point has been made that what we collect are *data* which only become statistics when we do something with them. Table 3 identifies the use to which data on reference activity were put. The survey concluded with three open-ended questions. "Do you feel that the collecting and reporting of statistics on reference activity is useful and/or meaningful?" "Are you satisfied with your present procedures?" "How might the collection, reporting, and use of statistics relating to reference activity be made more useful and/or meaningful?" These questions garnered many thoughtful and thought-provoking responses which can be discussed in the context of Table 3.

Reference statistics were primarily used for planning purposes internal to the library to determine hours of service and appropriate staffing levels. With this in mind, many respondents indicated that though reference statistics serve as indicators of activity levels and workload, they are approximations at best. As one respondent noted "a busy reference desk never keeps accurate statistics." In fact, numbers of transactions were reported least accurately when demand for service was highest. Staff are simply too busy to record all the questions they handle, particularly those they respond to in transit to or from the desk. Another respondent remarked that "we all have times when we are so busy that we just throw a bunch of tick-marks into the appropriate box at the end of the day." In addition, queries handled at points other than the reference desk are rarely included. A number of people also commented that not all staff were equally concerned with maintaining an accurate record of activity. In addressing this point, it was noted that reference desk staff need to be convinced that the collection of accurate information is important and that statistics will never be meaningful unless they are accurate. Staff need to know the reasons for collection of data and that statistics can and will be used in a meaningful way.

26.7 percent of university libraries and 46.9 percent of college libraries indicated that reported statistics are used to determine levels of budget support. Many commented that, though in theory the figures are used to justify existing levels of budget support or as arguments for increased funding for staffing, in actuality, the numbers rarely have any impact. It was noted that non-library administrators simply do not understand what the figures represent. One respondent remarked that unless one has experienced it first hand, one cannot understand what it means to answer 25 questions in an hour. In order to be meaningful to decision-makers, the bald numbers must be accompanied by a description of what reference activity entails and what it contributes to the academic enterprise. **If we believe that the collection and reporting of statistics related to reference activity are of use, we need to find ways of making statistics relevant to administrators who are not knowledgeable about reference and/or about libraries and are only concerned with the bottom line.**

Van House, Weil, and McClure suggest a number of ways of analyzing and correlating data to produce useful and meaningful results. These include comparing the annual number of reference transactions to cost data for the provision of reference service, dividing the number of reference transactions by the number of total library uses to determine the ratio of reference questions received to library uses, dividing the number of reference transactions by FTE staff available to provide service, to measure workload per staff member, and dividing the total number of reference transactions by the hours that reference service is available to determine how extensively the service is used.

A number of respondents indicated that reported statistics are used to evaluate reference service and to evaluate instructional programmes. Such evaluation appeared to be qualitative, based on anecdotal evidence, rather than quantitative. One respondent commented that in order to use statistics to evaluate more than just staffing, budget and hours we need to "identify other variables that have not been part of the standard recipe ... one beneficial effect of rethinking our motives is that, before launching into a project to collect statistics, we require ourselves to define and examine our goals very carefully. We might discover in some cases that we already have the information we need to make a decision."

For the most part, and with some disclaimers, respondents felt that the recording of data on reference activities is useful. In terms of making the collection and reporting of reference statistics more meaningful, there were two recurring themes:

> standardized definitions, forms, and methodologies are required in order to permit meaningful comparisons within and among institutions
>
> a means of objectively assessing the complexity of reference questions is required.

THE PILOT PROJECT - RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The pilot project aimed to test the utility of draft definitions and forms for the collection of data on reference activity. 15 university and 16 college libraries participated in the pilot project, working with forms and definitions (Appendices 4 and 5) and evaluating their efficacy. Following the test period participants completed a questionnaire (Appendix 6) and provided evaluative comments on the forms and definitions used in the test. Responses were received from 10 universities (66.6 percent) and from 15 colleges (93.8 percent). A summary of responses to the "Pilot Project Evaluation Questionnaire" is presented in Table 4. Definitions and forms were revised on the basis of pilot project responses.

Definitions

The majority of repondents to the 1992 CACUL Survey of Activities Relating to the Collection, Reporting, and Use of Reference Statistics in Canadian Libraries identified the need to (1) distinguish between reference and non-reference transactions and (2) to provide some measure of a reference transaction's intellectual complexity. The Working Group proposed the delineation of three transaction categories - basic reference transactions, complex reference transactions, and non-reference transactions variously labelled as facilitative or directional.

Since the American Library Association's definition of a reference transaction is the one currently in use in a number of Canadian academic libraries, the Working Group adopted it as the model definition for reference transactions proper. To address the need to make a further qualification of reference transactions on the basis of complexity, the Working Group expanded the model definition by adding two subcategories - basic and complex.

The ALA's parallel definition of a directional transaction was also considered a valid model but the term "directional" was deemed too narrow since literal interpretation of the word could result

in the inclusion of some types of non-directional yet non-reference queries into the reference category. Consequently, it was decided to label all non-reference transactions "facilitative" to include the many kinds of time-consuming assistance that are given in academic libraries which are still not "reference." The working definitions for the pilot project are provided in Appendix 4.

The working definitions employed in the pilot project were modified on the basis of comments and suggestions from the pilot project participants. In general, participants reported that the definitions permitted clear distinctions between non-reference and reference transactions and between basic and complex reference transactions. Although several respondents preferred the label "directional," the majority felt that the label "facilitative" was more encompassing. The "facilitiative" category provided a means of tracking assistance provided to users at service points other than the reference desk and for monitoring the increasing number of transactions involving assistance with computers including downloading, troubleshooting, disk formatting and so on.

A number of respondents reported that, initially, the proposed CACUL definitions required reference staff to analyze the type of assistance that had been given, but that by the end of the month the process had become quite automatic and that 99 percent of transactions fell easily into one category or another. Several respondents felt that an additional category for questions requiring considerable research on the part of reference staff member was required. The proposed distinction between "basic" and "complex" generated the most comment. Many respondents noted that the level of knowledge and experience of individual staff members, the library literacy level of the user, and the availability of "the perfect source" have an impact on whether a transaction is considered "basic" or "complex." What is "basic" for one staff member, may be complex for another. What is easy to explain to one user, may be extremely difficult to explain to another and therefore requires more effort and expertise on the part of the individual instructor. What is complex one day, may be basic the next. What would be a basic question, given the availability of a particular reference source, becomes complex if that source is not available. Finding an address, for example, might require consultation of one source, or may require considerable innovation and resourcefulness on the part of the reference staff member.

On the basis of feedback from pilot project participants, adjustments were made to the definitions. The Working Group focussed on the question of the purpose for keeping straight statistics and concluded that at the most fundamental level, the distinction between "basic" and "complex" is meant to provide a measure of the level of effort expended by the individual staff member rather than a measure of a given question's conceptual complexity. The issue of question content and the handling of questions by reference staff in the context of evaluation of reference service, is a separate one requiring other approaches suggested in the earlier CACUL Task Force which reported in June 1989. The revised definitions include a statement placing the emphasis, for statistical purposes, on how the question was handled rather than on the question itself.

The CACUL Executive has endorsed the following definitions and recommended their adoption in all college and university libraries. The Final Report of the Working Group (Appendix 7) included a further recommendation that the definitions be adopted by the Canadian Library Association as a national standard.

Information Exchanges or Transactions

FACILITATIVE

An information contact that facilitates the use of the library but which does not involve the knowledge, use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of any information sources other than those which describe the library, such as schedules, floor plans, handbooks, policy statements. Examples of facilitative transactions include giving directions for locating staff, users, physical features within the library, etc., explaining library policies/procedures, or giving assistance of a nonbibliographic nature, with machines, e.g. printing from CD-ROMS, downloading to disk, changing ribbons or paper.

REFERENCE

An information contact that involves the knowledge, use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of one or more information sources. Information sources include printed and nonprinted materials, machine-readable databases (including computer-assisted instruction, catalogues, and other holdings records), through communication or referral, other libraries and institutions, and persons both inside and outside the library. When a staff member utilizes information gained from previous use of information sources to answer a question, it should be treated as a reference exchange, even if the source is not consulted again during the transaction.

BASIC: A request for information which can be easily provided, generally with reference to one or two standard information/reference sources and including basic instruction if required. As a general guideline, takes up to five minutes. The emphasis is on the question as it was handled, not on the knowledge of the questioner or the experience of the staff member.

COMPLEX: A request for information which requires consultation of a variety of information/reference resources and/or the exercise of high-level query negotiation, information-seeking, and instructional skills. As a general guideline, takes more than five minutes. The emphasis is on the question as it was handled, not on the knowledge of the questioner or the experience of the staff member.

Table 4. Responses to the pilot project evaluation

QUESTION	YES	NO
1. The definitions clearly distinguish between reference and non-reference (directional or facilitative transactions).	95.5	4.5
2. The definitions clearly distinguish between basic and complex reference transactions.	81.8	18.2
3. The definitions are appropriate and we would use them.	81.8	18.2
4. We would use the following forms		
a. Daily (by time of day)	40	60
b. Daily (by hour)	40	60
c. Weekly	11	89
d. Monthly	11	89
5. We would prefer to collect statistics on a		
a. Daily basis	80.0	20.0
b. Using a valid sampling technique	20.0	80.0

Forms

The forms met with the general approval of pilot project participants and several respondents confirmed that the forms were easily modified to enable collection of data in additional categories. One respondent noted that the fact that the statistics sheet was divided into three equal parts seemed to promote accuracy.

The forms employed in the pilot project were designed to measure two variables only - type of question and period of collection i.e. daily (by hour), daily (by time of day), weekly and monthly. The intent was to develop a set of base forms which identify the major categories of information to be collected but which can be easily modified to meet the particular needs of individual reference departments. For example, respondents to the survey indicated that data on variables such as patron type or communication mode are important service measures. These additional variables can be easily accommodated within the context of the three question categories. An example of a form which breaks out telephone and in-person queries is included in Appendix 5. Similarly, the forms can be modified to reflect the timing of particular reference desk shifts or schedules.

Sampling

A number of respondents indicated that they had used sampling to clarify particular issues. For example, one institution noted that they had maintained a count of e-mail and telephone queries over three one-week periods in order to establish a basis for comparison at a later time. Others expressed an interest in sampling as an alternative to daily tallying of data. Proponents of sampling suggest that collecting information by sampling will produce much more statistically accurate results. For example, Edinger and Falk (1981:267)) note in their discussion of statistical sampling noted that

> It was also believed that if librarians were asked to record statistics for only eight weeks per year, they would be particularly aware of the project during those two-week periods and would therefore be especially conscientious about recording reference-desk queries.

Van House, Weil, and McClure suggest the following, noting however, that with this approach it is difficult to extrapolate the data from the sample period to provide an accurate figure for the entire academic year. At best, this data should be reported for the period of time it is collected.

> Select a reasonably representative time period -that is, a busy time but (in academic libraries) not during midterms or finals or periods of other unusual activity. During the sample period ask library staff to count reference transactions at all relevant service points. We recommend that you collect data all the hours that reference service is provided, for one or preferably two weeks.

The Report of the Task Force on Canadian Library Statistics (1988) suggests the following:

> Choose a typical day for each of the twelve months of the year, and on that day count (1) the number of people entering the library, and (2) the number of questions answered. From these data calculate the average number of questions answered per person entering the premises. Then multiply this number by the total number of people entering the premises annually.

Additional methodologies are described by Edinger and Falk (1981) and Halperin (1974 and 1978).

CONCLUSION

Most academic libraries undertake the collection and reporting of statistical information on activity levels for many aspects of both technical and public services. Data on reference activity are used for a variety of purposes within the library and within the institution, primarily to facilitate planning and improve the delivery of reference services. The data are also reported to external organizations and associations where they are used for broad level interinstitutional comparisons which often have a direct impact on operations within individual institutions.

Comparisons within and among institutions are only of value if it is clear that all institutions are collecting and reporting the same information. Therefore, one of the Working Group's primary mandates was to develop a standard set of definitions that could be used by all colleges and universities. At the same time, the definitions had to support internal collection and reporting requirements.

The Working Group believes that the use of the definitions and forms as recommended will result in a level of internal and interinstitutional comparability that has hitherto been lacking. They will also allow for more specific detail to be collected for local purposes - within the categories - without distorting their comparability.

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APPENDIX 1 Pretest Questionnaire

CACUL Survey of Activities Relating to the Collection Reporting and Use of Reference Statistics in Canadian Academic Libraries

A: INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

This information will be considered confidential and will be used for analysis purposes only.

1. Name of college/university: _____

2. Name of library _____

3. Name of contact person: _____

4. Address: _____

_____

5. Telephone: (___)_____ Fax: (___)_____

E-mail: _____

6. Would you be willing to be interviewed by telephone as a follow-up to your questionnaire responses?
_____ Yes _____ No

7. Would you be willing to participate in a pilot project to test the usefulness of proposed standard definitions, forms, and procedures for recording and reporting reference activities in Canadian academic libraries? _____ Yes _____ No

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Please Return To: E. Jane Philipps
Biology Library, Earl Hall
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario
K7L 3N6

Telephone: (613) 545-6646
Fax: (613) 545-6189

By: NOVEMBER 15, 1991

B: COLLECTION:

Please attach a sample of all forms and definitions used in the collection of reference statistics.

1. Do you maintain a formal record of the number of reference transactions which take place at any of the following?:

a. Reference/Information Desk ___ Yes ___ No

b. Public service points other than a Reference/Information Desk ___ Yes ___ No

c. Locations other than designated service points. Please explain. ___ Yes ___ No

Comments: _____

_____

2. Are recorded transactions categorized to indicate the level of complexity in any of the following ways?:

a. Time required to complete the transaction. Please specify. ___ Yes ___ No

b. Definition reflecting complexity of intellectual content. ___ Yes ___ No

c. Other. Please specify. ___ Yes ___ No

Comments: _____

_____

_____

3. Are recorded transactions categorized in ways other than those related to level of complexity?:

a. By hour of the day ___ Yes ___ No

b. By time of day (e.g. morning, evening) ___ Yes ___ No

c. By patron category . Please specify. ___ Yes ___ No

d. Other. Please specify.

Comments: _____

_____

_____

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B: COLLECTION (continued)

4. Are there categories of transactions handled at the Reference/Information Desk which are not recorded? _____ Yes _____ No

Comments: _____

_____

_____

5. Do you maintain a formal record of transactions not completed to the satisfaction of either or both the patron and the library staff member? If yes, how is this record used? __ Yes __ No

Comments: _____

_____

_____

C: REPORTING

Please attach a sample of all forms used in the reporting of reference statistics.

1. How often are reference statistics reported?

_____ Monthly _____ Annually _____ Other

Comments: _____

_____

_____

2. To whom are reference statistics reported?

a. Library administration ___ Yes ___ No

b. College/University administration ___ Yes ___ No

c. External organizations. Please specify. ___ Yes ___ No

Comments: _____

_____

C: REPORTING (continued)

3. In what format are reference statistics reported?

a. Total number of transactions ___ Yes ___ No

b. Broken down by type ___ Yes ___ No

c. Broken down by time ___ Yes ___ No

d. Other. Please specify. ___ Yes ___ No

Comments: _____

_____

_____

4. Does the manner in which reference statistics are reported reflect the manner in which they are collected? (For example, you maintain a very detailed record but report only cumulations.)
_____ Yes _____ No

Comments: _____

_____

D: USE:

1. Are reported reference statistics used: ___Yes ___ No

a. To evaluate Information/Reference service? ___ Yes ___ No

b. To determine levels of staffing? ___ Yes ___ No

c.To determine level of budget support? ___ Yes ___ No

d. To determine hours of service? ___ Yes ___ No

e.To evaluate instructional programmes? ___ Yes ___ No

. Other. Please specify.

Comments: _____

_____

_____

D. USE (continued)

2. Do you feel that the collecting and reporting of statistics on reference activity is useful/meaningful?

3. Are you satisfied with your present procedures for collecting and reporting statistics on reference activity?

4. How might the reporting of reference activity be made more useful/meaningful?

APPENDIX 2. Survey Questionnaire

CACUL Survey of Activities Relating to the Collection Reporting and Use of Reference Statistics in Canadian Academic Libraries

A: INSTITUTIONAL BACKGROUND

This information will be considered confidential and will be used for analysis purposes only.

1. Name of college/university: _____

2. Name of library _____

3. Name of contact person: _____

4. Address: _____

_____

5. Telephone: (___)_____ Fax: (___)_____

E-mail: _____

6. Would you be willing to be interviewed by telephone as a follow up to your questionnaire responses?
_____ Yes _____ No

7. Would you be willing to participate in a pilot project to test the usefulness of proposed standard definitions, forms, and procedures for recording and reporting reference activities in Canadian academic libraries? _____ Yes _____ No

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Please Return To: E. Jane Philipps
Biology Library, Earl Hall
Queen's University
Kingston, Ontario
K7L 3N6

Telephone: (613) 545-6846
Fax: (613) 545-6189

By: April 15, 1992

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

B: COLLECTION:

Please attach a sample of all forms and definitions used in the collection of reference statistics.

1. Do you have a written definition of a "reference" transaction? If yes, please include your definition.
____ Yes ____ No

2. Do you maintain a formal record of the number of reference transactions which take place at any of the following?:

a. Reference/Information Desk * ___ Yes ___ No

b. Public service points other than a Reference/Information Desk ___ Yes ___ No

c. Locations other than designated service points. Please explain. ___ Yes ___ No

*** Please indicate whether you have established separate "information" and "reference" desks.**

Comments: _____

_____

3. Are recorded transactions categorized to indicate the level of complexity in any of the following ways?:

a. Time required to complete the transaction. Please specify. ___ Yes ___ No

b. Definition reflecting complexity of intellectual content. ___ Yes ___ No

c. Other. Please specify. ___ Yes ___ No

Comments: _____

_____

B. COLLECTION (continued)

4. Are recorded transactions categorized in ways other than those related to level of complexity?:

a. By hour of the day ___ Yes ___ No

b. By time of day (e.g. morning, evening) ___ Yes ___ No

c. By day of the week ___ Yes ___ No

d. By patron category . Please specify. ___ Yes ___ No

e. By communication mode (e.g.in person vs telephone). Please specify. ___ Yes ___ No

d. Other. Please specify.

Comments: _____

_____

_____

5. Are there categories of transactions handled at the Reference/Information Desk which are not recorded? If yes, please explain. _____ Yes _____ No

Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

6. Do you maintain a formal record of transactions not completed to the satisfaction of either or both the patron and the library staff member? If yes, how is this record used? __ Yes __ No

Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

C. REPORTING

Please attach a sample of all forms used in the reporting of reference statistics.

1. How often are reference statistics reported?

_____ Monthly _____ Annually _____ Other

Comments: _____

_____

2. To whom are reference statistics reported?

a. Reference staff ___ Yes ___ No

b. Library administration ___ Yes ___ No

c. College/University administration ___ Yes ___ No

d. External organizations. Please specify. ___ Yes ___ No

Comments: _____

_____

3. In what format are reference statistics reported?

a. Total number of transactions ___ Yes ___ No

b. Broken down by hour of day ___ Yes ___ No

c. Broken down by time of day (e.g. morning,evening) ___ Yes ___ No

d. Broken down by day of the week ___ Yes ___ No

e. Broken down by patron category ___ Yes ___ No

f. Broken down by communication mode (e.g. in person vs telephone) ___ Yes ___ No

g. Other. Please specify. ___ Yes ___ No

Comments: _____

_____

_____

D: USE:

1. Are reported reference statistics used:

a. To evaluate Information/Reference service? Please explain.	___ Yes ___ No
b. To determine levels of staffing?	___ Yes ___ No
c.To determine level of budget support? Please explain.	___ Yes ___ No
d. To determine hours of service?	___ Yes ___ No
e.To evaluate library instructional programmes? Please explain.	___ Yes ___ No
f. To identify collection development needs?	___ Yes ___ No
g. Other. Please specify.	___ Yes ___ No

Comments: _____

_____

_____

_____

2. Do you feel that the collecting and reporting of statistics on reference activity is useful/meaningful?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

D. USE (continued)

3. Are you satisfied with your present procedures for collecting and reporting statistics on reference activity?

4. How might the reporting of reference activity be made more useful/meaningful?

APPENDIX 3. Pilot Project Instructions

February 15, 1993

1~
2~
3~
4~
5~

Dear 6~

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the CACUL Working Group on Reference Statistics pilot project. The purpose of the project is to test the utility of draft definitions and forms for the collection of statistics on reference activity which have been developed on the basis of responses to the April 1992 CACUL Survey of Activities Relating to the Collection, Reporting, and Use of Reference Activities in Canadian Academic Libraries.

The majority of respondents identified the need to (1) distinguish between reference and non-reference transactions and (2) to provide some measure of a reference transaction's intellectual complexity. The Working Group proposes the delineation of three transaction categories - basic reference transactions, complex reference transactions, and non-reference transactions variously labelled as facilitative or directional.

The Working Group recommends the adoption of the following broad definitions which are those of the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) of the American Library Association and which are already in use in a number of Canadian colleges and universities (Van House et al. 1990).

Reference Transaction - An information contact that involves the knowledge, use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of one or more information sources by a member of the library staff.

Directional or facilitative transaction - An information contact that facilitates the use of the library but does not involve the knowledge, use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of any information sources.

Reference transactions may be further categorized as "Basic" or "Complex". Basic level transactions include requests for factual information or requests for substantive information on a single subject which can be easily and quickly provided, generally with reference to one or two standard information/reference sources and including basic instruction if required. Complex transactions include requests for factual information or requests for substantive information on a complex subject which may require consultation of a variety of information/reference sources and/or the exercise of high-level information-seeking and

instructional skills.

Clearly, complexity is difficult to define, although most reference librarians have an inherent, if unexpressed understanding of what it means. Your comments and suggestions on the issue of definition of transaction complexity will be especially welcome.

The forms we have designed are variations on a theme. They measure two variables only, type of question and period of collection, i.e. daily (by hour), daily (by time of day), weekly, and monthly. Please select the format that best meets your needs. We have not attempted to incorporate in a single form the multitude of other variables that survey respondents currently measure. Again, your comments and suggestions will allow us to modify the base form. On the basis of pilot project responses and further analysis of survey results we will be making recommendations regarding variable selection and sampling techniques.

Thank you again, for your willingness to take part in this project. Evaluation guidelines will be sent to you before the end of March and we look forward to your responses. If you have any questions about the information contained in this package please let me know.

Sincerely,

E. Jane Philipps, Chair
CACUL Working Group on Reference Statistics
Phone: (613) 545-6846
Fax: (613) 545-6819
E-mail: philippj@qucdn.ca

Van House, Nancy A., Beth T. Weil, and Charles R. McClure. Measuring Academic Library Performance:A Practical Approach, Chicago: American Library Association, 1990.

CACUL Working Group on Reference Statistics

Pilot Project
March 1, 1993 to March 31, 1993

Process

1. Review the definitions with all staff members who will be participating in the project; this should include all those who regularly provide information/reference service.

2. Select the version of the form which best meets your need and make the number of **double-sided** copies required for the month of March.

3. Place the form in a visible/accessible position at those desks where information/reference statistics are recorded.

4. Using a tally |||| to record all transactions as facilitative, or as basic or complex reference during all those hours that information/reference service is regularly provided.

5. If practicable, maintain a brief note of questions which are difficult to categorize on the basis of the definitions provided and of those features of the forms and definitions which meet your needs and of those features which are in any way problematic.

6. On the basis of the month's experience complete the evaluation sheet which will be mailed to you as soon as possible.

APPENDIX 4. Pilot project working definitions

REFERENCE

An information contact that involves the knowledge, use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of one or more information sources. Information sources include printed and nonprinted materials, machine-readable databases (including computer-assisted instruction, catalogues, and other holdings records), through communication or referral, other libraries and institutions, and persons both inside and outside the library.

BASIC: A request for factual information or a request for substantive information on a single subject which can be easily and quickly provided, generally with reference to one or two standard information/reference sources and including basic instruction if required.

COMPLEX: A request for factual information or a request for substantive information on a complex subject which may require consultation of a variety of information/reference resources and/or the exercise of high-level information-seeking and instructional skills.

FACILITATIVE

An information contact that facilitates the use of the library but which does not involve the knowledge, use, recommendation, interpretation, or instruction in the use of any information sources. Facilitative transactions include "giving directions for locating staff, users, physical features within the library, or providing assistance (of a nonbibliographic nature) with machines" (Van House et al. 1990:96), and explaining library policies and procedures.

DAILY REFERENCE STATISTICS

Library: _____ Date: _____

	FACILITATIVE	BASIC	COMPLEX	TOTAL
Morning				
Afternoon				
Evening				
Total				

DAILY REFERENCE STATISTICS

Library: _____ Date: _____

	FACILITATIVE	BASIC	COMPLEX	TOTAL
8:00 - 9:00				
9:00 - 10:00				
10:00 - 11:00				
11:00 - 12:00				
12:00 - 1:00				
1:00 - 2:00				
2:00 - 3:00				
3:00 - 4:00				
4:00 - 5:00				
5:00 - 6:00				
6:00 - 7:00				
7:00 - 8:00				
8:00 - 9:00				
9:00 - 10:00				
Total				

WEEKLY REFERENCE STATISTICS

Library: _____ Date: _____

	FACILITATIVE	BASIC	COMPLEX	TOTAL
Morning				
Afternoon				
Evening				
Total				

MONTHLY REFERENCE STATISTICS

Library: _____ Month: _____

	Facilitative	Basic	Complex	Total
Week 1				
Week 2				
Week 3				
Week 4				
Week 5				
Total				

DAILY REFERENCE STATISTICS

Library: _____ Date: _____

	FACILITATIVE		BASIC		COMPLEX		TOTAL	
	In person	Telephone	In person	Telephone	In person	Telephone	In person	Telephone
Morning								
Afternoon								
Evening								
Total								

APPENDIX 6 . Pilot Project Evaluation Questionnaire

CACUL Working Group on Reference Statistics

Pilot Project - Evaluation

Please provide detailed comments and suggestions wherever possible.

A. DEFINITIONS

1. The definitions clearly distinguish between reference and non-reference (directional or facilitative) transactions. Please identify any queries which were difficult to classify.

____ Yes ____ No

Comments:_____

_____

_____

_____

2. The definitions clearly distinguish between basic and complex reference transactions. Please identify any queries which were difficult to classify.

____ Yes ____ No

Comments:_____

_____

_____

3. The definitions are appropriate and we would use them. Please suggest changes that would make the definitions more useful for you.

____ As is ____ With changes ____ No

Comments:_____

_____

_____

_____

B. FORMS

4. We would use the following form(s). Please attach examples of modified forms.

	As is	With changes	No
a. Daily (by time of day)	____	____	____
b. Daily (by hour)	____	____	____
c. Weekly	____	____	____
d. Monthly	____	____	____

Comments:_____

_____

_____

_____

5. We would prefer to collect statistics

a. On a daily basis ____ Yes ____ No

b. Using a valid sampling technique ____ Yes ____ No

Comments:_____

_____

_____

_____

6. General Comments _____

_____

_____

_____

PLEASE RETURN BY APRIL 30 1993

APPENDIX 7. Final report of the working group on reference statistics

THE CACUL WORKING GROUP ON REFERENCE STATISTICS WAS ESTABLISHED BY THE CACUL EXECUTIVE IN JANUARY 1990 WITH THE FOLLOWING MANDATE:

- DEVELOP DEFINITIONS, FORMS AND PROCEDURES, AND CONDUCT A PILOT STUDY, TO ESTABLISH A BODY OF NORMATIVE DATA ON REFERENCE ACTIVITIES IN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES.

THE MEMBERS OF THE WORKING GROUP ARE SANDRA BLACK (MOHAWK COLLEGE), ANDREA GLOVER (UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE), JIM KELLY (UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE), AND JANE PHILIPPS (QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY). THE ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE WORKING GROUP ARE OUTLINED BELOW.

DATA COLLECTION:

The first task of the Working Group was to collect information on current activities relating to the collection and use of reference statistics in Canadian academic libraries. To that end

- a questionnaire was developed and pretested by 12 college and 10 university libraries in December 1991.
- the questionnaire, revised on the basis of pretest responses,was mailed as the "CACUL Survey of Activities Relating to the Collection, Reporting, and Use of Reference Statistics in Canadian Academic Libraries" to 76 college and 42 university libraries in April 1992.

The response rate of 78.6 percent from university libraries and 56.6 percent from college libraries provides a substantial body of data on reference activities.

DEFINITIONS AND FORMS

On the basis of the survey data, a literature review, and an examination of existing standards, the Working Group

- developed definitions for 'Basic' and 'Complex' reference transactions and for 'Facilitative' non-reference transactions
- developed a set of forms to be used in recording information on reference activity
- investigated sampling techniques

PILOT PROJECT

To test the efficacy of definitions and forms

- 14 college and 9 university libraries used the draft forms and definitions at their reference desks in March 1993 and
- completed an evaluation of the forms and definitions.

The definitions and forms were modified on the basis of responses from the pilot project participants.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

Members of the Working Group presented the results of the survey and the pilot project at the Working Group's own session at the Canadian Library Association Annual Conference in Hamilton in June 1993. The session was very well attended with wide representation from all types of libraries. The definitions were favourably received and subsequently published in Feliciter (November/ December 1993).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The CACUL Working Group on Reference Statistics recommends that

- the CACUL Executive endorse the forms and definitions developed by the Working Group (attached), encourage by all possible means their adoption in all college and university libraries, and recommend to CLA that they be adopted as a national standard.
- the results of the survey and pilot project be submitted to the CACUL Executive for publication as a CACUL Occasional Paper by June 1994;
- the CACUL Working Group on Reference Statistics ceases to be a standing committee of CACUL as it has completed its mandate.
-

SIGNED BY:

Sandra Black _____ Jim Kelly _____

Andrea Glover _____ Jane Philipps _____